***The English Teachers Companion* by Jim Burke**

**Chapter 5**

Vocabulary is so heavily influenced by culture and community. It is important to help students become successful reader and writers, it is important to pay attention to vocabulary instruction. I really appreciate the suggestion to teach vocabulary students need in order to understand instructions and directions. Too often in my internship, I came across students who could not read the instructions or directions much less understand the words all the words in the directions. It has been my observation that not enough time is given to whether or not students understand the words in directions. We assume that by the time they reach our grade level, they have a functioning mastery of the language used in directions. This is far from the truth. I like that in Burkes text, instructors are asked to pay attention to helping students strengthen vocabulary in this area. I have previously been made to feel like focusing on these kinds of words was a waste of time.

The distinction between productive and receptive vocabulary is so new to me. It will shape how I teach vocabulary and my understanding of my own vocabulary. Separating words into categories helps me better organize my teaching of vocabulary. What has historically made teaching vocabulary so hard for me is feeling overwhelmed by all the words that needed to be taught. I like the categories because it helps me make well informed decisions about what to teach, and how to teach it. There are a lot of words that do not require direct instruction.

I have learned a lot about how to teach vocabulary in meaningful and impactful ways. I like the suggestion to make vocab instruction dynamic. I hope to have the same sense of freedom to address vocabulary the same way Burke describes in this text. I would say that historically I have not done a good job of teaching vocabulary. I had hoped that my students would best strengthen their vocabulary from reading and had most focused on student’s comprehension skills to increase vocabulary.

**Chapter 6**

It is most apparent that education is in an ever change

I read this section and wish grammar had been taught to me this way. I imagine I would have developed a greater understanding and maybe even a love for grammar. This I am sure is the perspective of the adult English teacher version of me and probably in no way reflects the perspective of the high school version of me. I would have liked if he had spent time giving examples of how to teach other grammar concepts. I am sure this is because I find this book in a lot of ways a resource for lessons. Burkes presentation of teaching English is so motivating. I find myself feeling empowered and informed. I hope I carry this feeling into the classroom with me next semester as I enter a high school class room for the first time.

I would like to learn how to use grammar lessons the way Burke does. He has a way of weaving it into the lesson in a way that is subtle. His teaching of grammar comes across more of a discussion about grammar and its usefulness than direct instruction. I have to learn how to embrace this discussion style as an acceptable way to teach grammar. I feel a little uncomfortable saying I have taught a skill when I feel like I have only had a discussion about it.

I like the idea of teaching grammar in a combination of ways. I have struggled with feeling like the only option I had to teach grammar was within the context of writing. I like Burkes suggesting the combination of direct instruction, within the context of writing and discussion around grammar. This combination is one I probably feel most comfortable with.

Chapter 7

Teaching writing

Did anyone else catch the typo on page 153?

Using examples seems like a powerful teaching tool. Students get an opportunity to use their own judgment to determine what a good paper is. This encourages students to invest in their own good writing.

I love the point Ramono makes about how mastering editing will not guarantee a person will master the craft of writing. Editing is one component of good writing. It is just as significant as voice. Too often as instructors, we focus on the editing

I love the idea of making assignments purposeful. I am excited as I imagine my students writing children’s stories and taking a fieldtrip to a local elementary school to read them to the students. I imagine that a project like that would encourage students to take pride in their final products. I like this because then I do not have to feel like I have to pressure students to do their best, instead the student intrinsically motivates themselves. I really like the idea of giving writing purpose. There are so many creative ways to do this.

Burkes discussion around the 5 paragraph essay seems lofty to me. The GPS specifically requires students to master the 5 paragraph essay and I feel teaching it should be treated as an option instead of being ignored all together.

**6+1 Trait writing**

I have seen the 6 trait writing model several times before. I wonder how different this is from formulaic writing models like the Schaffer method.

Journaling

This is such a tricky activity to encourage in class. I want my students to write freely at home. I do not want the responsibility of monitoring the journals to ensure there are not problematic entries. I contradict myself because I think it is an incredibly valuable component to teaching writing. I will with great trepidation and a lot of prayer, ask my students to write freely in their journals. I am more compelled by the idea that students need a place to comfortably and freely think than I am driven by the fear of what they could say in their journal. What a precarious journey I embark upon as I endeavor to teach others the craft of writing.

***The Death and Life of the Great American School System*** by Diane Ravage

**Chapter 1**

**I have the right to change my mind**

**I already have great respect for Ravitch. In the world of educational politics, it can be a blow to ones credibility to support one perspective and then turn around and support the opposing view point. It just so happens that we as educators are in the business of changing people’s minds. It is our job to teach people to analyze information in the hopes that minds will grow, change and be made stronger. Consequently, I see Ravitch’s change of mind as an indicator of her commitment to her own education and not at all as an indication of weakness of fallibility**

**Ravitch’s experience as a Democrat in a Republican administration reminds me of the article on *Learning and Forgetting*. In that article the author discusses how influential the company we keep can be on or ideas and beliefs. Ravitch discusses her own experiences of having her personal and professional political beliefs that were democratic become shaped and influenced by the republican administration she chose to work for. Reading as Ravitch describes her experiences makes me believe that educational theories such as Constructivism and Behaviorism are theories that apply to learners of all ages, not just children.**

**I had the experience of working at one of the charter schools that Ravitch describes as becoming popular in the 90’s for its attempts to reform public education by using business models to improve the efficiency of schools. My personal experience at a KIPP school left me with a metaphor that helped me make sense of the KIPP machine. I began to see KIPP is the McDonald’s of education. It has its signature educational model much like the Big Mac. It often felt as though instruction could only happen one way, the KIPP way. KIP, like McDonald’s, has mass appeal and can become a very popular produc.t. The problem is that there are children who don’t like McDonalds or Big Mac. Some children want Whoppers or maybe even sushi. It seems like education is better as a buffet instead of a single fast food restaurant.**

**Chapter 8**

It seems counterproductive to use something as fallible as testing as a tool for accountability. If it is common knowledge that these tests are unreliable, then why are they the measure of student’s intellect or teacher’s ability to instruct? One can’t help but wonder whether the decision to use test scores as such a significant indicator of student and teacher success isn’t motivated by some other hidden agenda. I am forced to wonder-who makes money off of using test this way? Too often in American culture when obviously irrational decisions are made by the government, it is because some sector stands to make significant financial gain. It becomes hard, if not impossible to have faith in the government’s desire to truly reform education. And while I do not advocate cheating or gaming he testing system, when I consider the unrealistic conditions under which test are used, I find myself feeing empathy for those who become so desperate that they cheat the system.

There seem to be loop holes created by the drive to boost student performance on high stakes testing. Education does not seem to be concerned with identifying and perpetuating practices that result in productive results for children. This chapter begs the reader to ask the question-What is the goal of education in this country? Examination of current trends and practices seems to indicate that helping students achieve personal or academic success is not a major focus of education. It is hard to see what is the focus and point of education from the perspective of the government. The governments’ idea to focus on more teaching has not lined lead to a better quality student.

**Chapter 11**

Lessons Learned

“For the past century or more, education reformers have tried out their ideas in the classroom.” From the look of things, it is apparent that educators and educational policy makers are still in the trial and error phase of developing policies and procedures that will lead to their desired outcomes. Part of the confusion is the lack of clarity about the desired outcomes. It seems unfair and illogical to require teachers to make sense out of confusing and inconsistent policies and expectations. To penalize teachers by docking their checks when students don’t make good test scores or to or bonuses when they do is to place an unfair weight upon the shoulder of the classroom instructor. Financial bonuses and penalties like this suggest to teachers, students and parents that teachers alone should carry the burden and responsibility of turning our countries children into capable students. Ravitch herself proposes a more balanced model of student development when she describes the notes she took at a conference of world educators-I copied this list of essential ingredients of a successful education systems “. . . a strong curriculum, experienced teachers, effective instruction, willing students, adequate resources and a community that values education.” The quote alludes to a team of people from various communities working together help develop children into capable well rounded students. It seems as though educators are taking cues from ideas like the one proffered in this quote. The overarching impression I get as I read and learn more about educational policy is that administrators are still moving through their own learning curve and are working hard to arrive at a final place of clarity that will hopefully effectively shape the goals and policies of the American educational system.

I really respond to what Ravitch says here about finding an effective curriculum that leads to the desired outcome. As a student, I don’t really feel comfortable with the idea that individual educators have to construct entire units in hopes that they will skillfully address the standards. While I enjoy reading and writing, I do not believe I am knowledgeable enough about child psychology and how to teach the English enough to masterfully construct curriculum that will lead to students’ mastery of the standards. I believe curriculum is most effectively developed by those who have studied both child psychology and have a mastery of teaching. Challenges that can arise when you do not have such people creating curriculum can be evidenced in the debates surrounding grammar instruction. Educators are now beginning to consider child psychology and its impact on the ability to grasp abstract concepts in grammar. Adjusting content to fit the ability level of students will hopefully lead to better outcomes.

Articles

**Creation of Meaning**

The section that talks about a person’s personal plot or style of life I found interesting. People get to know us by becoming familiar with our style of life. The process of becoming familiar Eisner describes as creating or identifying codes or patterns that repeat themselves. Putting such codes together, helps one to create meaning.

Man has a biological need to create meaning out of the world in which he lives.

Reading is a genetic process out of decoding the expressive forms created by man so that the meaning within those forms can be recovered.

This article makes a strong case for why visualization when reading is so important to comprehension. The easier it is for a reader to visualize the text and link what they are reading to actions they are already familiar with, the better able the reader is to make meaning from the text.

I kept trying to apply what Eisner is saying to text in content areas I am not familiar with. I remember an activity in an education course earlier this semester when I had to read a word problem and us e the information to solve a physics problem. Needless to say, I am not familiar with the laws of physics, and had an awful time trying to solve the problem because I did not know what equation to use. I did however do a really good job of understanding the scenario described in the problem. I see this as an example of using the strategic aspect of reading successfully.

The ending story makes me think of the adage, “You never miss your water until your well runs dry.” In the current quest to improve education, too often affirmation and celebration of what does work is missed. Is it possible to celebrate, enjoy and revere those things that do work in a classroom while at the same time make improvements to what is already a good plan? Only the future will tell.

**Strategies Used By Proficient Readers**

I am very familiar with these strategies as I was encouraged to research them and used when teaching 6th grade reading. I found it important to make the students aware of these strategies and to use them purposefully. So often, students use skills unconsciously in the English/Language Arts content area. It seems like it would be easier to teach them how to use these skills better if they become conscious users of them. I taught a 6th grade reading class and remember using chants to try to encourage student to bring student subconscious use of reading strategies to the conscious mind. These are skills people use to crate meaning as Eisner discussed in her article. An educator’s job becomes more about helping students transfer the skills they successfully use to create meaning in other areas to the content are a teacher is trying to teach. The strategies discussed in this text are skills a person uses to be literate in a variety of areas. These same skills help to define literacy in writing, speaking, and other areas.

Framework of the Basic “Tell Me Question”

I really like the author’s use of personification in this article where he begins to talk about the books personality. I have often found myself in discussions with books as though they could answer the question I write in the margins. The truth is that often times my question do get answered. Every good book I have read has encouraged me to consider different possibilities for its characters. When I really get connected to particular characters, I have found myself wondering how they would deal with my real life situations.

I really love these questions. They encourage the reader to use the skills proficient readers use in meaningful ways. As I read each question, I can see how the questions encourage students to analyze, draw conclusions, make connections, visualize and so much more. I have often found myself wanting students to love the books I have chosen for them to read in class. Especially if the book I s a classic, I have not often done a good job of creating an atmosphere that allowed for well thought out dissenting opinion about a novel. These questions make room for readers to support their positive or negative opinions about a text with thoughtful responses. I am having and epiphanic moment at an instructor and can see how this one article will force me to release the desire to have control over my students preferences as they relate to books. I realize I have often taken a student’s disdain for a text I have chosen as a personal attack. This article gives me the tools to help students transform their dissenting opinions into quality thinking.

**Learning to Forget**

This article has forced me to reconsider how I see the current learning process I am engaged in as a graduate student. My grades are a reflection of my intellect. When I get a grade less than an A, I place tremendous amount of stress on my body, which can’t take the stress by the way. I may not say anything to anyone else, but historically, I have chosen to respond to bad grades with feelings of insecurity and judgment. I know the feelings I have about myself and grades must be reflected in my grading of students. I have to change my relationship to learning and forgetting if I am to help my students have a more positive felling and experience with the learning process. Once again, I find myself being asked to do something on the future with my students that are not modeled in my experiences in graduate school or in my internship. As a graduate student, I know that whatever grades I earn on my projects are the grades I will receive on my report card. I do not see my professors

I really love the point about learning from the company you keep. This point is true for me. I have had a more difficult time learning new things alone that within a group. Often times other peoples input and perspective help to shape my understanding and encourage synthesis of new information. I remember how much I learned about technology over the summer in my group projects. This article makes me think of a point Eisner made in her article about the creation of meaning. She posits that creating meaning is a biological process among other things. That point seems to be undergirded by the idea that learning with other people is easier. Maybe somehow the biological component of learning is addressed by proximity and physical exchange with others. An excellent student comes from a community of other excellent students.

**Audit**

Emotional development of children

Maturity’/ Emotional what is the theory that suggest that children’s emotional growth should be considered as part of the educational process?

It is imperative that education pays more attention to the psychological development of the people we serve. We must continue to ask ourselves if the activities, expectation and tolls we use with the students we serve are appropriate and will lead to the desired end result. It does not always seem that educational policy makers, administrators and teachers agree on the desired result and consequently have an even harder time agreeing upon practices and tools that are affective in teaching children. America must focus on deciding what the overall goal of schools are before it can hope to find solutions to low test scores, high student dropout rates and promoting students who are not prepared to enter the workforce or the rigors of higher education.

Many believe that charter schools have found viable solutions the problems that plague public schools. The most popular example of a successful charter school system is the Knowledge is Power Preparatory charter schools commonly referred to ad KIPP. KIPP believes its policies lead to greater academic achievements in students. KIPP has instituted thins like an extended school day and access to instructors until 9 sometimes10pm. This charter school has been widely successful and is backed by philanthropist such as the Gates Foundation and Fisher Foundations. All KIPP schools subscribe to a similar model of extended days, increases access to instructors who are given cell phones by the school and asked to accept student calls until 9:30pm, teacher home visits and more. These practices seem to produce the desired results. Students are scoring well on standardized test. The country is now wondering if KIPP has found the answer.

Is the solution to begin to treat our schools like business? Will the answer to the demons that plague the American education system be found in the construction of a formula that promises to produce the perfect teacher and the perfect student? Charter school like KIPP are being celebrated for all of the success they are having with students. There equation; long hours+ Saturday school+ afterhours access to teachers= higher test scores, while it does lead to higher test scores, as a former KIPP instructor, I know from firsthand experience that it also leads to teacher burn out, students who struggle with academic independence and higher level thinking. Ravitch sends out a cautionary message to educators to be more careful about jumping on the latest fads in education. She advises everyone to give theories and trends time to prove their validity before attempting to mimic them. While KIPP’s popularity is growing in mainstream America, I believe it would behoove the education world to give the institution time to provide the evidence of sustainable success before educators jump on the bandwagon and begin to mimic KIPP policies and procedures on a wider scale.

It is short sighted to look for solutions to the problems in education that lead to merely boost in higher test scores. Educational polity would be a formulaic model that

One crucial component that seems to be missing from current educational policies are practices that reflect an interest in developing maturity, self-awareness, and ethical behavior in children. Creating policies and curriculum that help to develop these qualities in our children will go a long way toward producing the kind of student that is a critical thinker and can perform well on a variety of tests. Articles like *Reading and the Creation of Meaning* by Elliot Eisner propose concepts that reflect the Constructivism theory of education which states, that by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. It seems like a larger influx of Constructivism theory into popular trends in education would help create practices that could broaden their focus to include the development of the child rather than the current trend which reflect a singular focus on test results and how to improve them.

Current trends in education encourage teachers to use activities that help students score well on high stakes standardized test. Classrooms are currently filled with educators who either feel pressure to cheat, as the recent APS cheating scandal exemplifies, or to teach to the test. Teaching to the test employs Behaviorism theories by training students to perform for test. Teaching to the test usually does not result in developed higher level thinking skills and uses Behaviorism to limit students rather than help them expand their thinking abilities. H Articles like Learning and Forgetting ask the reader to consider theories germane to Behaviorism Theory of education which says that a child’s educational process is heavily impacted by what they are trained to do This article focuses on concepts germane to the Behaviorism theory. The influence of people we hang around on our psyche

Teachers are responsible for providing engaging lessons that help a child develop critical thinking skills as well as provide students with

Accountability becomes impossible to achieve when there are not common goals. Accountability becomes increasingly more elusive if the measurement tool is flawed. Lack of unanimity and dysfunctional measures of outcomes rest on the back of the education system n in a manner similar to the way the world rests on Atlas’s shoulders. Such weight keeps education from straightening itself out and finding policies that help to develop children into productive, thoughtful adult members of the global community. Government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents and community leaders must find a way to agree upon appropriate measureable goals for the education system. This team of people must function like the proverbial village it is said is needed to raise a child. An inability to do so will result in the continued degradation of American minds, culture and ingenuity.

http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/03/31/135014989/kipp-charter-schools-have-funding-edge-study-says